



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: Dec. 2, 2002 (02-63)

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West Nile virus found in Whatcom County horse

OLYMPIA – The state Department of Agriculture announced today (Dec. 2) that West Nile virus has been confirmed in an 18-year-old horse in Whatcom County. The horse, which became ill in November, is recovering. It is the second horse known to have become infected with West Nile virus in Washington.

“This is a reminder for horse owners to consider vaccinating their horses,” said Dr. Robert Mead, state veterinarian. “Now may be a good time to act because the vaccine requires two doses three to six weeks apart, and immunity will not be achieved until five weeks after the second vaccine. An annual booster should be given just prior to the start of the mosquito season in your area.”

The positive test results were reported by the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory in Pullman and confirmed today by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa.

West Nile virus is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito and can infect people, horses, and many types of birds. Scientists do not believe the virus is spread from person to person or from animal to person. Mosquitoes get infected when they feed on an infected bird.

West Nile virus affects horses, mules, donkeys, and other equines much more often than other domestic animals. Most horses do not become ill and show no symptoms at all. Those that do become ill show signs such as loss of appetite, loss of coordination, confusion, fever, stiffness and muscle weakness. About one-third of horses that become ill die.

To report a potential case of West Nile virus in horses, call the State Veterinarian’s Office at (360) 902-1878, or the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Olympia at (360) 753-9430. Visit the department’s West Nile virus Web page at <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/AnimalHealth/WNVdefault.htm>.

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